

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 ICA-11 HA-05 MCT-02 A-01 OPR-02 SY-05
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R 201355Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1809
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN POUCH
AMCONSUL DURBAN POUCH
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG POUCH
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 PRETORIA 4139

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PDIP, PINT, PINS, SF
SUBJECT: BREYTENBACH THEATER: MIXED AUDIENCE TEARGASSED

REF: USICA JOHANNESBURG 1569

1. SUMMARY: AMID THE GROWING DISPUTE SURROUNDING THE PRETORIA MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY'S REFUSAL TO INTEGRATE THE CITY'S LEADING THEATER, THE OPENING OF THE CITY'S FIRST PERFORMANCE FOR MIXED AUDIENCES AT ANOTHER THEATER WAS DISRUPTED BY A TEARGAS BOMB OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN. MEANWHILE, WHITES ORGANIZING A PROTEST AGAINST SEGREGATED LIVE THEATER IN PRETORIA HAVE BEEN HARASSED AND ATTACKED BY A SMALL BAND OF ULTRA-CONSERVATIVES. END SUMMARY.

2. BACKGROUD: IN JUNE 1978, THE SAG ACCEPTED APPLICATIONS FILED BY 26 THEATERS FOR A BLANKET PERMIT TO ALLOW MIXED AUDIENCES AT ALL PERFORMANCES. TWELVE OF THE THEATERS
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WERE IN THE TRANSVAAL (ALL IN JOHANNESBURG), EIGHT IN THE CAPE PROVINCE, AND SIX IN NATAL. MAJOR CITIES LEFT WITH "WHITES ONLY" THEATERS WERE PRETORIA, BLOEMFONTEIN, KIMBERLEY, PEITERSBURG, AND EAST LONDON. DESPITE THE INTRODUCTION OF MIXED THEATER AUDIENCES IN NINE OTHER CITIES, THE PRETORIA CITY COUNCIL (PCC) DECIDED TO KEEP THE CAPITALS CITY'S FINEST THEATER, THE BREYTENBACH, FOR

WHITE AUDIENCES ONLY, A DECISION SIMILAR TO THE PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED POLICY OF NO MIXED RACE AUDIENCES AT THE NEW PRETORIA OPERA HOUSE, WHICH IS STILL UNDER CONSTRUCTION. BOTH DECISIONS WERE CONTROVERSIAL AND THE BREYTENBACH ONE HAS BECOME A MATTER OF INTENSE DISPUTE.

3. BREYTENBACH ROW: CONTROVERSY OVER PRETORIA'S "WHITES ONLY" THEATER POLICY BEGAN WHEN ISRAELI AMBASSADOR UNNA PUBLICLY REFUSED AN INVITATION TO ATTEND THE PREMIERE OF "GOLDA" AT THE BREYTENBACH BECAUSE OF BREYTENBACH'S RACIALLY EXCLUSIVE ADMISSION POLICY. UNNA'S MOVE PRECIPITATED WIDESPREAD PRESS CRITICISM OF THE PCC'S REFUSAL TO OPEN THE THEATER; THE PRETORIA WOMEN'S ZIONIST LEAGUE SUBSEQUENTLY DECIDED TO WITHDRAW THEIR SPONSORSHIP OF "GOLDA." BREYTENBACH BECAME A "CAUSE CELEBRE" FOR INTEGRATED THEATER AS FIVE PROMINENT AFRIKANER PLAYWRIGHTS DECLARED THAT THEY WOULD NOT PERMIT THEIR PLAYS TO BE PRODUCED IN SEGREGATED PRETORIA HOUSES. LEADING PLAYWRIGHT ADRE BRINK LASHED OUT AT THE PCC FOR "ADOPTING A TROGLODYTIC ATTITUDE." AS INDIGNATION SPREAD IN THEATER CIRCLES, AT LEAST 10 AFRIKAANS SPEAKING ACTORS AND ACTRESSES PLUS MANY ENGLISH-SPEAKING COLLEAGUES SAID THEY WOULD ALSO BOYCOTT THE BREYTENBACH. THE MAINSTAY LOCAL CULTURAL ORGANIZATION, PERFORMING ARTS COUNCIL OF THE TRANSVAAL (PACT), DECRIED THE PCC REFUSAL TO OPEN PACT'S OFFICIAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THEATER IN PRETORIA TO ALL RACES, DOYEN OF PRETORIA THEATER, P.P. BREYTENBACH (74) AFTER WHOM THE THEATER WAS NAMED, ANNOUNCED A PUBLIC PETITION DRIVE TO REVERSE PCC'S STAND ON SEGREGATED THEATER. PCC'S REACTION TO THIS INTENSE CRITICISM WAS A REAFFIRMATION OF THEIR ORIGINAL DECISION, AND A SUSPENSION OF THEIR R58,000 (1R EQUALS \$1.15) GRANT TO PACT. (ONE PCC MEMBER SUGGESTED THE MONEY BE SPENT TO BUILD A THEATER FOR BLACKS IN ONE OF PRETORIA'S TOWNSHIPS, A SUGGESTION SUBSEQUENTLY SUPPORTED BY THE RIGHT WING HNP). PACT TERMED THE MOVE "AN ACT OF DESPICABLE VINDICTIVENESS" AND THE LEAD EDITORIAL IN PRETORIA NEWS SAID THAT THE PCC MOVE APPEARED TO BE A "PETTY AND PETULANT ACT DESIGNED MERELY TO PUNISH THOSE WHO DARED TO CRITICIZE THE CITY COUNCIL." BY THE TIME "GOLDA" OPENED ON JULY 6, THE ENTIRE DIPLOMATIC CORPS AND OTHER COMMUNITY FIGURES BOYCOTTED THE PERFORMANCE.

4. NATS ENTER FRAY: TRANSVAAL ADMINISTRATOR SYBRAND VAN NIEKERK AND NAT MP FROM SUNNYSIDE (WHERE BREYTENBACH IS LOCATED) JAN VAN ZYL, DEFENDED THE PCC DECISION AS A VALID EXERCISE OF

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

A LOCAL OPTION UNDER SAG POLICY. PRETORIA NAT MP LOUIE NEL
COUNTERED THAT OPEN THEATER IS IN FULL ACCORD WITH
SAG POLICY. NEL WAS JOINED BY MINISTER OF FOREIGN
AFFAIRS PIK BOTHA WHO ASKED: "ARE WE PREPARED TO LOSE
MILLIONS OF RANDS IN FOREIGN INVESTMENT OR LOANS BECAUSE
THE PRETORIA CITY COUNCIL IS NOT PREPARED TO ALLOW A
FEW CULTURED BLACK PEOPLE ATTEND A PLAY AT THE
BREYTENBACH?" BOTHA TOLD ANNUA MEETING OF THE
CONSERVATIVE AFRIKANER STUDENT UNION (ASB) THAT THE
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS WILL OPEN A NEW CHANNEL
OF COMMUNICATION TO INFORM LOCAL AUTHORITIES OF THE
CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTIONS. BOTHA SAID THE BREYTENBACH
CONTROVERSY HAD NEGATED SAG'S POSITIVE STEP IN OPENING
26 THEATERS. (THE ASB PASSED A RESOLUTION HIGHLY
CRITICAL OF THE PRETORIA DECISION.)

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5. PRETORIA OPENS A THEATER: IN AN EFFORT TO HEAD OFF MOUNTING CRITICISM OF THE BREYTENBACH DECISION, THE CITY COUNCIL APPLIED FOR AND SAG MINISTER OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT APPROVED A BLANKET PERMIT FOR PRETORIA'S PIET VAN DER WALT THEATER. PCC CRITICS WERE NOT PLACATED. DIE TRANSVALER CALLED ATTENDING THE VAN DER WALT, BY ANY STANDARD, AN INFERIOR THEATER WHEN COMPARED TO THE BREYTENBACH, AKIN TO "ENTERTAINING A GUEST IN THE KITCHEN".

6. PETITION CAMPAIGN; VIOLENCE BEGINS: MR. P.P. BREYTENBACH'S CALL FOR A PETITION TO PROTEST THE PCC STAND QUICKLY GAINED MOMENTUM (AS WELL AS A NUMBER OF ABASIVE PHONE CALLS). OVER 50 LEADING SOUTH AFRICAN ACTORS AND ACTRESSES MANNED 30 STATIONS IN DOWNTOWN PRETORIA ON JULY 15 TO COLLECT SIGNATURES FOR PRESENTATION TO THE CITY COUNCIL. THE LOCAL PFP BRANCH ALSO SENT A BALLOT/PETITION TO THEIR MEMBERS. BREYTENBACH'S "OPEN THE BREYTENBACH" CAMPAIGN WAS OPPOSED BY SMALL RIVAL "KEEP BREYTENBACH WHITE" COUNTER PETITION EFFORT AT THREE OF THE 30 STATIONS. HOURS AFTER THE PETITION STANDS OPENED, APPROXIMATELY 20 MEN, ONE OF WHOM WAS RECOGNIZED AS A MEMBER OF THE ULTRA-CONSERVATIVE HERSTIGTE NASIONALE PARTIE (HNP) YOUTH MOVEMENT, SUCCESSIVELY ATTACKED THREE PETITION STATIONS, INJURED SEVERAL WOMEN, AND DESTROYED A NUMBER OF PETITIONS. ONE ATTACKER SHOUTED IN AFRIKAANS "YOU ARE BREAKING THE LAW OF GOD AND FATHERLAND" AND AN ELDERLY OBSERVER AT THE SCENE DESCRIBED THE ATTACK AS "MALICIOUS AND VILE IN THE EXTREME". DESPITE THIS INCIDENT, THE PETIONERS ACQUIRED OVER 10,000 SIGNATURES IN ADDITION TO THE SEVERAL THOUSAND DESTROYED BY THE ATTACKERS.

7. INCIDENT AT VAN DER WALT: ON THE EVENING OF JULY 18, THE PLAY "MONKEY WALK" OPENED AT THE VAN DER WALT, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PRETORIA'S FIRST INTEGRATED THEATER. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THERE WERE 10 BLACKS AMONG 441 WHITES, ALL OF WHOM WERE MET BY 20 PICKETING WHITES IN FRONT OF THE THEATER PROTESTING THE INTEGRATED SEATING. DURING THE FIRST ACT, A TEARGAS CANISTER EXPLODED AND PATRONS HAD TO EVACUATE THE THEATER UNTIL THE PLAY COULD RESUME 90 MINUTES LATER. FIFTY PERCENT OF THE PATRONS LEFT AFTER THE TEARGAS INCIDENT. ACCORDING TO JULY 19 AFTERNOON PRESS, MINISTER OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STEYN HAS SAID THAT HE WILL ENSURE THE NECESSARY SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS TO PREVENT ANOTHER DISRUPTIVE INCIDENT AT THE VAN DER WALT. STEYN SAID THE POLICE ARE INVESTIGATING THE MATTER AND WILL "SEVERELY AND DEFINITELY" DEAL WITH THE OFFENDERS.

8. COMMENT: BREYTENBACH IS IMCROCOSM OF THE MULTITUDE OF
CONFLICTING FORCES AT WORK AS SAG ATTEMPTS TO
DISMANTLE PART OF "PETTY APARTHEID" WITHIN THE "GRAND
APARTHEID" SCHEME. IRONICALLY, BOTH WHITES WHO FAVOR AND
OPPOSE OPENING THE THEATER TO MIXED AUDIENCES CLAIM
THEY ARE ONLY FOLLOWING SAG POLICY. THE AFFAIR
ILLUSTRATES THE FACT THAT, AS LONG AS THE DROPPING OF PETTY
APARTHEID IS LEFT TO MUNICIPAL OR LOCAL AUTHORITIES,
RATHER THAN BEING MADE THE SUBJECT OF NATIONAL LEGISLATION,
IT WILL PROCEED ON AN UNEVEN COURSE (CAPE TOWN 0558).
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